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The Prosocial Versus Proself Power Holder: How Power Influences Sacrifice in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Romantic partners often have to sacrifice their interests to benefit their partner or to maintain the relationship. In the present work, we investigated whether relative power within the relationship plays an important role in determining the extent to which partners are likely to sacrifice. Drawing from both classic theories and recent research on power, we tested two competing predictions on the relationship between power and sacrifice in romantic relationships. We tested whether (a) power is negatively related to sacrifice and (b) power is positively related to sacrifice. Furthermore, we also explored whether the association between power and sacrifice is moderated by commitment and inclusion of the other in the self. To test our hypotheses, we used different methodologies, including questionnaires, diary studies, and videotaped interactions. Results across the five studies (N = 1,088) consistently supported the hypothesis that power is negatively related to tendencies to sacrifice in close relationships.

Keywords

power, sacrifice, prosocial behavior, romantic relationships

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Lisa and Mark are in a romantic relationship. It's a sunny Sunday morning and they are discussing what to do on such a nice day. Soon it becomes clear that the planning is not going to be trouble-free; Mark would like to play tennis, and Lisa would like to visit her family in the countryside. Neither of them would like to spend the day without the other. Thus, if they want to be together, one of them may choose to give up his or her first preference and sacrifice for the sake of the partner or the relationship. In the present work, we investigated whether relative power within the relationship plays an important role in determining who is more likely to sacrifice in romantic relationships.

Classic theories and research on power have shown that possessing greater power is related to self-serving behaviors and outcomes. For example, power increases social distance and induces people to be more self-oriented and less attentive to others (e.g., Fiske, 1996; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Magee & Smith, 2013). However, recent findings have challenged this view. When people feel responsible for another person's welfare, such as in communal or highly committed relationships, power might actually increase prosocial behavior (e.g., Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010). Building on these two different perspectives of power, we tested two competing predictions regarding the relationship between power and sacrifice in romantic relationships. Specifically, we examined whether (a) power is negatively related to sacrifice and (b) power is positively related to sacrifice. Furthermore, we also explored whether the power–sacrifice association is moderated by properties of relationships, such as commitment and inclusion of the other in the self (IOS).

Power and Sacrifice in Romantic Relationships

Romantic couples often encounter situations in which partners need to decide between pursuing their self-interest and sacrificing to promote the well-being of the other partner and of the relationship. A certain amount of sacrifice from either or both of partners is necessary to preserve and nurture the relationship (for a review, see Impett & Gordon, 2008).

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Which interpersonal dynamics predict who is more likely to sacrifice and who is less likely to do so? We argue that social power is a crucial interpersonal dynamic that affects sacrifice in the relationship. Social power has been defined as the capacity to influence another person's outcomes or behavior and being the decision maker in relationships (for a review, see Simpson, Farrell, Orina, & Rothman, in press). In particular, we investigate how relative social power (i.e., the extent to which one partner possesses greater power relative to the other partner) affects sacrifice. We chose to investigate relative social power because if both individuals were able to influence each other's outcomes very much, but to an equal extent, then those individuals would be in a relationship characterized by high interdependence but no power asymmetry (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Instead, relative social power captures the asymmetrical properties of the relational influence. Compared with other types of relationships in which power might be dictated by just one source—for example, at work, the boss can distribute rewards (e.g., promotions) or punishments (e.g., payoffs)—in romantic relationships, the power bases are more complex and power is the result of multiple sources (e.g., Simpson et al., in press). One partner could have more influence than the other because the first partner controls the couple's finances or the couple's social network. Or, one partner could have more influence than the other because the first partner is less dependent on the relationship, has better persuasive skills, or is more dominant. It might also be that each partner has more power than the other on different domains. One partner might have more influence on the household, whereas the other might have more influence on how to spend the free time, for example. The final power dynamic in the relationship is ultimately determined by the sum of all these different bases and domains, and it is often reflected by the ability of influencing and making decisions in the relationship across domains.

Although in many romantic relationships partners strive for equality, it is often the case that one partner is more likely to influence the other and has, consequently, more power in the relationship (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). When people have power and thus can exert influence on their partner's outcomes, they have the option to display two different types of behavior. They either can be selfish and promote their self-interest or they can display generous behavior and promote their partner's interest. How will the power holder react in these situations? If Mark is the one who is cooking tonight and has the power to decide which dishes to serve, will he be more likely to be kind and cook Lisa's favorite dish or be self-oriented and cook his favorite dish instead? Because power asymmetry is a pervasive characteristic of romantic relationships (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997), it is important to understand the ways in which it might be related to prosocial behavior in this context. Drawing from the power literature, we propose and discuss two competing hypotheses in this regard.

The Selfish Power Hypothesis

Having or lacking social power has a number of psychological consequences and many effects on interpersonal dynamics. There are theoretical and empirical reasons to suggest that power induces people to be self-oriented and less concerned about others' and relationships' outcomes and, therefore, less likely to sacrifice. This represents the foundation of the *Selfish Power Hypothesis*, which proposes that, to the extent that individuals experience greater relative power in the relationship, they will be less likely to sacrifice.

First, because the outcomes of high power individuals are less affected by others' actions, high power individuals do not need to have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of others. For example, research has shown that high power individuals are poor in perspective taking and empathic accuracy (Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998; Galinsky et al., 2006; Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010), are more likely to use stereotypes when forming impressions (Fiske, 1993; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000), and objectify social targets (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Thus, it is possible that the powerful partners are less likely to sacrifice simply because they fail to understand the other partner's needs and feelings.

Second, power increases psychological and emotional distance from other people (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012; Magee & Smith, 2013) and shifts attention away from others' interests and toward more personal ones (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Thus, even when powerful partners recognize the other partner's feelings and preferences, they might still prioritize their own interests over their partners' interests. Consistent with this view, research has found that power undermines compassion (van Kleef et al., 2008) and willingness to help strangers (Lammers et al., 2012). In romantic relationships, power has been related to increased sexual harassment and abuse (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Kaura & Allen, 2004; Malamuth, 1986) and infidelity among both men and women (Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann, & Stapel, 2011).

Power and Sacrifice: The Prosocial Power Hypothesis

However, the classic view that power is always detrimental for interpersonal relationships has been challenged in recent years by a growing body of research that shows that, under certain circumstances, power can increase socially responsible behavior. It is hypothesized that power stimulates actions toward the fulfillment of personal goals, and when people hold prosocial or relationship goals, power induces an action tendency that promotes these goals (e.g., Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Thus, when people care about others, power can induce a feeling of social responsibility that promotes generosity. Consistent with this view, research has shown that power increases prosocial behavior among communally oriented

individuals (i.e., individuals who are genuinely attentive and care about other people's needs), presumably because being in power means being in a position where communally oriented people feel responsible and capable to fulfill the other person's needs. In contrast, power decreases prosocial behavior among exchange-oriented individuals (i.e., individuals who benefit others to get something in return), because they are primarily concerned with their own interest (Chen et al., 2001). DeMarree, Brinol, and Petty (2014) have also shown that power increases prosocial behavior when participants were primed with prosocial constructs, but power increases antisocial behavior when participants were primed with antisocial constructs. Power also enhances empathic accuracy when individuals are prosocially oriented (Côté et al., 2011) and, in organizational studies, research has found that power is positively associated with willingness to sacrifice for their team (Hoogervorst, De Cremer, van Dijke, & Mayer, 2012). Finally, in close relationships, power was shown to increase forgiveness, at least among individuals high in commitment (Karremans & Smith, 2010). Thus, all this work suggests that the relationship between power and prosocial behavior might depend on the degree to which individuals care about others' well-being. When individuals highly value other people's welfare, power might in fact promote prosocial behavior.

It is plausible that romantic relationships represent a context in which power positively affects prosocial behavior because people tend to be highly concerned about their romantic partner's welfare. Previous research has indeed shown that in romantic relationships, people's automatic tendency is to sacrifice, while it takes self-control to override this impulse (Righetti, Finkenauer, & Finkel, 2013). In romantic relationships, people are concerned about the other's welfare for at least two reasons. First, romantic relationships, compared with other types of relationships, are characterized by high levels of commitment and a long-term orientation toward the relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). When people are highly committed, and therefore have a strong goal to preserve the relationship, they might prioritize the relationship and their partner's welfare over self-interest because they do not want to lose their relationship. Second, when people are involved in a romantic relationship, they tend to merge their self-concept and their partners' concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), coming to think of themselves as part of a dyad rather than an independent individual. Thus, individuals care about their partners' welfare because self- and partner's welfare are both part of a unit. Thus, it is plausible that in romantic relationships, similar to other situations in which people care about others' welfare, power induces a sense of social responsibility that fosters prosocial behavior. This argument represents the foundation of our *Prosocial Power Hypothesis*, which proposes that, to the extent that individuals experience greater relative power in the relationship, they will be more likely to sacrifice.

Exploring Moderation by Relationship Properties

Nevertheless, not all romantic relationships are characterized by high level of commitment or IOS. Therefore, it is also plausible that rather than observing a main effect of power on sacrifice, relationship variables, such as commitment and IOS, might moderate the relationship between power and sacrifice. If, in close relationships, some people might still give priority to self-oriented goals whereas others might give priority to relationship goals, it is plausible that power will reduce sacrifice when people are not very concerned about their partner's well-being (i.e., when they are low in commitment and IOS) but that power will promote sacrifice when people are highly concerned about their partner's well-being (i.e., when they are high in commitment and IOS). Thus, it is possible that to the extent that individuals experience greater relative power in the relationship, they might be less likely to sacrifice when they display low commitment and low IOS, but that they might be more likely to sacrifice when they display high commitment and high IOS. Alternatively, if the Selfish Power Hypothesis would be supported, it could be qualified by an interaction in which power affects sacrifice negatively only when individuals display low levels of relationship properties, but not when individuals display high levels of relationship properties. However, if the Prosocial Power Hypothesis would be supported, it could be qualified by an interaction in which power affects sacrifice positively only when only when individuals display high levels of relationship properties, but not when individuals display low levels of relationship properties.

Research Overview

The present research investigates the association of relative power (i.e., the extent to which one partner possesses greater power in the relationship than the other partner) with sacrifice. We advance two competing hypotheses about the nature of the relationship between relative power and sacrifice: (a) the Selfish Power Hypothesis and (b) the Prosocial Power Hypothesis. We further assessed possible moderation by commitment and IOS. We tested our hypotheses in five studies. In Study 1, we tested our two hypotheses by assessing power as it unfolds in everyday life when people make decisions together. We then examined how power is related to willingness to sacrifice. In Studies 2a and 2b, we tested our hypotheses in a seven-wave study using dating (Study 2a) and marital samples (Study 2b). Specifically, we examined whether relative power assessed at the study onset (both as a self-reported measure and as coded by independent raters who observed interactions between partners) was associated with willingness to sacrifice in the subsequent six assessment waves. Study 3 used a five-wave longitudinal study, and Study 4 used a daily diary procedure to test our hypotheses.

Because previous research has shown that commitment is related to willingness to sacrifice (Etcheverry & Le, 2005; Van Lange et al., 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), we controlled for commitment in all the studies. Furthermore, because past research has found that men tend to be the power holders in the relationship (Felmlee, 1994), we also controlled for gender in all of the studies.[2] Finally, as discussed previously, there are multiple bases of power in a romantic relationship, and it is possible that people might infer their power from the amount of previous sacrifices that they have done in their relationship. Thus, to demonstrate that power is a predictor, rather than an outcome, of sacrifice, in Study 3, we conducted residualized lagged analyses to assess whether power predicted sacrifice over time (and we also tested the opposite trend: whether sacrifice would predict power over time). Finally, in Study 4, we assessed whether power assessed at study onset predicted later daily sacrifices controlling for the frequency of sacrifices performed in the previous months.[3]

Study 1

Study 1 aimed to test our hypotheses using an event-contingent diary to assess power in couple's everyday life and its relationship with willingness to sacrifice. To test the Moderation by Relationship Properties Hypothesis, we also assessed whether commitment moderated the relationship between relative power and sacrifice.

Method

Participants. Participants were 127 individuals (78 females) involved in romantic relationships (93% dating, 6% engaged or married). Participants were 19.28 years old on average (*SD* = 1.24) and had been involved in their relationships for an average of 15.26 months (*SD* = 15.57). Participants received partial course credit for their participation.

Procedure. Participants were recruited for the study through introductory psychology courses in an American university. Participants first attended a laboratory session during which they were given instructions for completing the event-contingent diary. For the next 7 days, participants completed a brief questionnaire as soon as possible after each decision they and their romantic partner made together. Participants reported on average 25.77 decisions (*SD* = 14.33). Following the diary phase of the study, participants returned to the laboratory and completed a battery of questionnaires.

Measures. On each event-contingent diary entry, participants reported their relative power for the decision that they and their partner made (two items; for example, "Who was more influential in making this decision?"; 1 = *my partner*, 7 = *me*; α = .86). At the conclusion of the weeklong diary phase of the study, participants also reported their willingness to sacrifice (Van Lange et al., 1997). First, they reported the four most important activities in their life other than their relationship. Subsequently, participants imagined that it was not possible to engage in each activity they had listed and maintain their relationship with their partner. Participants reported to which extent they would consider giving up that activity for the good of their relationship (0 = *definitely would not give up activity*, 4 = *might consider giving up activity*, 8 = *definitely would give up activity*; α = .76). Also at the conclusion of the study, participants reported their commitment (Rusbult et al., 1998; seven items; for example, "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner"; 0 = *strongly disagree*, 8 = *strongly agree*; α = .91).

Results

Key findings. We regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed at the conclusion of the study onto the average of participants' relative power for all the decisions they reported during the diary phase. The average relative power was marginally negatively associated with willingness to sacrifice, $\beta = -.17$, $t(125) = -1.92$, $p = .057$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [–.35, .005]. To assess whether power was associated with sacrifice above and beyond commitment and possible gender effects, we regressed willingness to sacrifice onto relative power while controlling for commitment and gender. The effect of power on willingness to sacrifice remained marginally significant, $\beta = -.14$, $t(123) = -1.67$, $p = .097$, 95% CI = [–.30, .02]. To test the moderating role of commitment, we regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed at the conclusion of the study onto the average of participants' relative power for all the decisions they reported during the diary phase, commitment, and their interaction. The interaction between the average relative power and commitment was not significant, $\beta = -.09$, $t(123) = -1.12$, $p = .26$.

Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for the Selfish Power Hypothesis. Relative power in decision making was negatively related to willingness to sacrifice assessed at the end of the weeklong study. Findings were not moderated by commitment or IOS.

Studies 2a and 2b

In Studies 2a and 2b, we tested our two competing hypotheses. To gather convergent validity of our findings, relative power was assessed not only as a self-reported measure but also as observed by independent coders who rated a videotaped discussion between partners. Both measures were assessed at the study intake.[4] Participants completed measures of willingness to sacrifice at study

intake and at six subsequent waves. Finally, we also assessed whether commitment or IOS moderated the relationship between relative power and sacrifice. The differences between Studies 2a and 2b were the relationship status of the participants (dating vs. married couples, respectively), duration of the study (6 months vs. 2 years, respectively), and length of time between assessment waves (1 month vs. 4 months, respectively).

Method

Participants. Participants in Study 2a were both partners from 74 dating couples. Participants were 20.47 years old on average (*SD* = 1.70) and had been involved in their relationships for an average of 16.91 months (*SD* = 13.73). Study 2a participants were paid $80 if they completed all components of the study or a prorated amount if they did not. Participants in Study 2b were both partners from 120 married couples. Participants were 39.65 years old on average (*SD* = 13.71) and had been married for an average of 10.87 years (*SD* = 12.28). Study 2b participants were paid $200 if they completed all components of the study or a prorated amount if they did not.

Procedure. Study 2a participants were recruited for the study via classroom announcements and flyers posted around the campus of an American university. Study 2b participants were recruited for the study via newspaper advertisements, craigslist and Facebook postings, and flyers distributed through a local school system in United States. Participants first completed an online intake questionnaire followed by a laboratory session. During the laboratory session, they took part in a videotaped discussion about how they had changed since the beginning of their relationship as well as a series of other tasks not relevant to the present investigation. Over the subsequent months, participants completed six follow-up questionnaires; Study 2a participants completed a follow-up questionnaire every month for the following 6 months whereas Study 2b participants completed a follow-up questionnaire every 4 months for the following 2 years. During the course of the study, 14 dating couples broke up and 1 married couple divorced; data reported by these couples on study waves occurring after their break up were dropped from all the analyses.

Measures. Participants reported their relative power in the relationship on the online intake questionnaire (Ronfeldt, Kimerling, & Arias, 1998; four items; for example, "Who has more say about how much time the two of you spend with other people?"; 1 = *my partner*, 7 = *me*; αs = .60 and .65). On all seven research occasions, participants reported on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, unless otherwise indicated) willingness to sacrifice for their partner and relationship (four items; for example, "I would be willing to give up desirable activities for the sake of my relationship"; α = .74). On all seven research occasions, participants also reported their commitment as in Study 1 (Rusbult et al., 1998; αs = .93 and .91) and IOS scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). During their visit to the laboratory at study onset, participants engaged in a 5-min discussion with their partner in which they discussed the ways they had changed since the beginning of their relationship. Participants were asked to discuss both positive and negative changes and to focus on the ways in which their relationship had altered who they were. Seven trained observers later watched and rated couples' discussions. The observers rated the male and female participants' behavior in the discussions separately, and in counterbalanced order, as well as completing ratings relevant to several couple-level constructs. At the couple level, and relevant to the present investigation, the observers rated the relative power between the members of each couple ("Who has more power in this relationship?"; 3 = *the man*, 3 = *the woman*; intraclass correlations [ICCs] = .73 and .67). Ratings for the male participants were reverse-scored so that for all participants, higher scores indicated greater relative power.

Results

Analysis strategy. Because the data provided by a given participant on multiple research occasions and the data provided by two partners in an ongoing relationship are not independent, we used multilevel modeling procedures (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In our analyses, measures from each wave of data collection were nested within participant, which were nested within couple, in a three-level hierarchical linear model. We represented intercept terms as random effects and represented slope terms as fixed effects as recommended for dyadic data analyses (Kenny et al., 2006). Findings were not reliably moderated by participant sex and, therefore, we treated dyads members as indistinguishable. All variables were standardized prior to data analysis.

Study 2a findings. We regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed on all seven research occasions onto self-reported relative power as assessed at study intake. Although not statistically significant, there was a trend indicating that self-reported relative power may be negatively associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = –.10, $t(98)$ = –1.61, p = .111, 95% CI = [–.22, .02]. Next, we regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed on all seven research occasions onto observer-rated relative power as coded from the laboratory session at study onset. Observer-rated relative power was significantly negatively associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = –.15, $t(73.6)$ = –2.76, p = .007, 95% CI = [–.26, –.04]. We also regressed willingness to sacrifice onto self-reported relative power and observer-rated relative power while controlling for commitment and gender. Self-reported power was not associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = –.11, $t(99.8)$ = –1.08, p = .28, 95% CI = [–.19, .05], but observer-rated relative power remained significantly associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = –.11, $t(74.8)$ = –1.99, p = .049, 95% CI = [–.21, –.001].

To test the moderating role of commitment and IOS, we regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed on all seven research occasions, in turn, onto self-reported relative power as assessed at study intake, commitment (or IOS) as assessed on all seven research occasions and their interactions. For willingness to sacrifice, none of the interactions between self-reported relative power and commitment or IOS were significant, β = .04, $t(523) = 0.96$, $p = .34$; and β = .01, $t(789) = 0.59$, $p = .55$, 95%, respectively. We also regressed willingness to sacrifice as assessed on all seven research occasions, in turn, onto observer-rated relative power as coded from the laboratory session at study onset, commitment (or IOS) as assessed on all seven research occasions and their interactions. The interaction between observer-rated relative power and commitment was not significant, β = .01, $t(54) = 0.16$, $p = .87$. However, results showed a significant interaction between observer-rated relative power and IOS, β = .08, $t(766) = 2.97$, $p = .003$. We performed simple slope analyses to examine the nature of this interaction. The effect of observer-rated relative power on willingness to sacrifice was significant among individuals low in IOS, 1 *SD* below the mean; β = –.20, $t(91.1) = -3.43$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [–.32, –.08], but was not significant among individuals high in IOS, 1 *SD* above the mean; β = –.03, $t(127) = -0.47$, $p = .64$, 95% CI = [–.16, .10].

Study 2b findings. Results revealed that self-reported relative power was marginally negatively associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = –.08, $t(178) = -1.67$, $p = .097$, 95% CI = [–.18, .01]. However, in this sample, observer-rated relative power was not associated with willingness to sacrifice, β = .02, $t(114) = 0.48$, $p = .63$, 95% CI = [–.07, .12]. Furthermore, self-reported relative power was not significantly associated with willingness to sacrifice when controlling for commitment and gender, β = –.01, $t(177) = -0.27$, $p = .78$, 95% CI = [–.11, .08].

Finally, we also tested the moderating role of commitment and IOS on the associations of self-reported power with willingness to sacrifice. None of the interactions between self-reported relative power and commitment or IOS were significant, β = –.02, $t(1525) = -0.68$, $p = .49$; β = .04, $t(223) = 0.86$, $p = .39$; and β = .03, $t(1544) = 1.13$, $p = .26$, respectively. Considering observer-rated relative power, none of the interactions between observer-rated relative power and commitment or IOS were significant, β = .03, $t(1291) = 1.16$, $p = .25$; β = –.04, $t(194) = -0.67$, $p = .50$; and β = –.02, $t(1122) = -0.61$, $p = .54$, respectively.

Discussion

Results of Studies 2a and 2b provided further support for the Selfish Power Hypothesis. Although some individual analyses did not yield statistically significant results, across the two studies there was a pattern indicating that relative power (both as a self-reported measure and as observed by independent raters) was negatively related to willingness to sacrifice. Study 2a also showed one moderation by relationship properties: Among individuals low in IOS, relative power was negatively related to willing to sacrifice, whereas among individuals high in IOS, power was not associated with willingness to sacrifice. However, these last results need to be interpreted with caution given that these findings were not replicated in Study 2b and that only one out of the eight possible interactions was significant.

Study 3

The previous studies supported the Selfish Power Hypothesis; Study 3 sought to replicate these results assessing sacrifice of important personal goals. In Study 3, we assessed whether relative power influences the extent to which people dedicate time and effort to personal goals when they are not good for their partner. In this study, we also gathered data on relative power and sacrifice on two research occasions (1 year apart) to test whether relative power predicted change in sacrifice over time.

Method

Participants. Participants were both partners from 160 couples who took part in research activities at Times 2, 3, 4, and 5 of a 2-year, five-wave longitudinal study. At Time 2, participants were 25.97 (*SD* = 4.58) years old, on average; most couples dated steadily or were engaged or married (25% dating steadily, 29% engaged, 38% married, 8% other), and most lived together (84%). On average, participants had been involved with their partners for 37.58 months (*SD* = 24.55). Couples were paid $50 to $120 at each time point for participating in the study.

Measures and procedure. Participants were recruited through advertisements posted in around campus of an American university. We recruited newly committed couples—at Time 1, they had begun living with one another, become engaged, or married one another within the previous year or planned to do so during the coming year. Participants came to the lab once every 6 months and completed a battery of questionnaires. At Times 2 and 4, participants reported their relative power in the relationship (three items; for example, "Who has more influence in your relationship—you or your partner?" 0 = *my partner*, 4 = *we are equal*, 8 = *me*; Times 2 and 4, αs = .77 and .72). To assess actual sacrifice, participants reported the extent to which they usually give up the pursuit of important personal goals when they interfere with their partner's preferences. Specifically, participants reported how much they usually sacrifice their personal goals when those goals are not good for their partner (partner does not approve those pursuits, the activities do not benefit partner, or are inconvenient for him or her; four items; for example, "I put less time and effort into my goal pursuits"; Times 2, 3, 4, and 5, αs ranged from .86 to .91). Finally, at Times 2 and 4, they responded on a 9-point scale (0 = *do not agree at all*, 8 = *agree completely*,

unless otherwise indicated) to measure commitment (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009; Times 2 and 4, αs = .91 and .92), and, as in Studies 2a and 2b, participants also reported their IOS (Aron et al., 1992).

Results

Key findings. The analysis strategy (i.e., multilevel modeling; Kenny et al., 2006) is identical to the one used in the previous two studies. The concurrent analyses were performed on the data of the Waves 2 and 4 because power was assessed only at those occasions. Consistent with previous studies, relative power was negatively associated with sacrifice of personal goals, β = –.12, $t(437) = -2.88$, $p = .004$, 95% CI = [–.20, –.04]. Furthermore, relative power was negatively associated with sacrifice of personal goals when controlling for commitment and gender, β = –.09, $t(456) = -2.23$, $p = .026$, 95% CI = [–.17, –.02].

We then tested the moderating role of commitment and IOS. We regressed sacrifice of personal goals onto relative power, commitment, or IOS and their interactions. Results showed a significant interaction between relative power and commitment, β = –.07, $t(543) = -1.99$, $p = .047$. We performed simple slope analyses to examine the nature of the significant interactions. Relative power was negatively related to actual sacrifice among individuals high in commitment, 1 *SD* above the mean; β = –.19, $t(487) = -3.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [–.29, –.09], but not among individuals low in commitment, 1 *SD* below the mean; β = –.04, $t(496) = -0.85$, $p = .397$, 95% CI = [–.14, .06]. The interaction between relative power and IOS was not significant, β = .01, $t(315) = 0.20$, $p = .845$.

Finally, to assess change over time in sacrifice as a function of relative power, we performed residualized lagged analyses. In these analyses, we simultaneously predicted Time 3 sacrifice from Time 2 relative power and Time 2 sacrifice, and Time 5 sacrifice from Time 4 relative power and Time 4 sacrifice. In these analyses, "earlier" refers to the time point of the predictors and "later" refers to the time point of the criterion. Supporting the Selfish Power Hypothesis, earlier relative power predicted later sacrifice, β = –.08, $t(349) = -1.89$, $p = .060$, 95% CI = [–.16, –.00], when controlling for earlier relative power. We also explored whether sacrifice would predict change over time in power. We predicted Time 4 relative power from Time 2 sacrifice and Time 2 relative power. Earlier sacrifice did not predict later power, β = –.02, $t(178) = -0.41$, $p = .679$, 95% CI = [–.13, .09].

Discussion

Replicating all our previous studies, Study 3 further supported the Selfish Power Hypothesis. Relative power showed to be negatively related to sacrifice of important personal goals, not only in concurrent but also in longitudinal analyses. Specifically, Study 3 showed that relative power predicted changes in sacrifice over time (as revealed by residualized lagged analyses), but sacrifice did not predict changes in power over time.

Study 4

The previous studies supported the Selfish Power Hypothesis; Study 4 sought to replicate these results by assessing sacrifice in a diary study. The advantage of diary studies is that people report their behavior on a daily basis and they tend to be more accurate than self-report measures that rely on the global memory of past events. In this study, to ensure the unique role of power as assessed at the study onset in predicting daily sacrifices, we controlled for commitment, gender (as in the previous studies), and the frequency of past sacrifices.

Method

Participants. Participants were 130 couples (260 individuals). All participants were recruited in the Netherlands and were required to speak fluent Dutch to participate. Participants were eligible to the study if they were together for longer than 4 months, if they did not have children, and if they had a smartphone. All couples were heterosexual, except for one lesbian couple. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 43 years ($M = 23.33$, $SD = 3.65$). More than half of the participants (63.6%) were students, 34% were working full-time, and 2.4% said to be both working and studying. Couples' romantic involvement ranged from 4 months to 17 years ($M = 34.13$, $SD = 29.01$ months). Furthermore, 34.8% of the couples reported to be living together, of which a minority (2.4%) of the couples were married.

Measures and procedure. Couples were recruited in a variety of ways, including advertisements on Internet forums, social networks (e.g., Facebook), and personal approach. Participants came to the lab in the beginning of the study and completed a battery of questionnaires. Given that most relationships are characterized by a certain degree of power unbalance (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997) but it might not be socially desirable to admit so, we used a single, forced-choice question (one item; "Who is the power holder in your relationship? Me–My partner") to really induce participants to individuate the power holder in their relationship. Commitment was assessed as in Studies 2a and 2b (α = .81), IOS was assessed as in the previous studies (Aron et al., 1992), and participants reported the frequency of past sacrifices (one item; "In the past 3 months, how often have you sacrificed for your partner?"; 1 = *never*, 7 = *very often*). After the intake session, participants reported every evening for 8 days how many sacrifices they had made that day (one item; "My sacrifices today: How many did you make?").

Results

Key findings. The analysis strategy (i.e., multilevel modeling; Kenny et al., 2006) is identical to the one used in the previous three Studies. Power was coded as 0 if participants reported their partner to be the power holder and as 1 if participants reported they were the power holder. Consistent with previous studies, power was negatively associated with the amount of sacrifices reported daily, $b = -.13$, $t(203) = -2.85$, $p = .005$, 95% CI = [–.22, –.04]. Furthermore, power was negatively associated with sacrifices when controlling for commitment, for gender, and for frequency of past sacrifices, $b = -.11$, $t(204) = -2.38$, $p = .018$, 95% CI = [–.20, –.02].

We then tested the moderating role of commitment and IOS. The interactions between power and commitment or IOS were not significant, $b = .02$, $t(212) = 0.46$, $p = .648$, and $b = .03$, $t(224) = 0.66$, $p = .510$, respectively.

Discussion

Replicating all our previous studies, Study 4 further supported the Selfish Power Hypothesis. Power holders were less likely to sacrifice as reported in an 8-day diary assessment. The relationship between power and sacrifice remained significant when controlling for commitment, gender, and frequency of past sacrifices. The findings were not moderated by commitment or IOS.

Meta-Analytic Summary

Across studies, the Selfish Power Hypothesis received good support. In contrast, the results for moderation by commitment and IOS were less consistent, and simple slope analyses revealed different patterns of interactions across studies. Given that we performed numerous tests and that some of them are bound to be significant because of chance (i.e., Type I error), we conducted a meta-analysis to gauge the reliability of our findings and to test our hypotheses across studies.

Analytic Strategy

To test the Selfish Power Hypothesis, we performed a meta-analysis of the main effects of self-report relative power[5] on sacrifice across the five studies, and we also performed the meta-analysis of the effects controlling for commitment and gender. To test whether the association between relative power and sacrifice is reliably moderated by any relationship property, we performed a meta-analysis examining the effect sizes for the relation between relative power and sacrifice for participants high in relationship variables (i.e., 1 *SD* above the mean of commitment and IOS) and participants low in relationship variables (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean of commitment and IOS).

We used the correlation as the measure of effect size. A negative correlation indicates that higher levels of relative power are associated with lower levels of sacrifice. The correlation was calculated using the sample size along with the *t*-value of the multilevel analyses. We used a random effects model to calculate the overall average effect sizes for the relation between power and sacrifice. Then, for each separate effect size distribution, we report the 95% CI. Analyses were conducted using the Hedges and Olkin (1985) approach with Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software.

Results

First, we tested the Selfish Power Hypothesis. Results of the meta-analyses revealed that, across studies, there was a significant negative relation between relative power and sacrifice, $r = -.13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [–.19, –.07]. This relationship was also significant when controlling for commitment and gender, $r = -.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [–.17, –.06]. Thus, the Selfish Power Hypothesis was supported.

Second, we tested the moderation by commitment and IOS. Considering commitment, results of the meta-analysis revealed that relative power was negatively related to sacrifice among individuals high in commitment, +1 *SD* above the mean; $r = -.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [–.20, –.08], and among individuals low in commitment, 1 *SD* below the mean; $r = -.10$, $p = .001$, 95% CI = [–.16, –.04], and there was no significant difference in the strength of the effect size between high and low committed individuals, $Q(1) = 1.07$, $p = .300$. For IOS, results of the meta-analysis revealed that relative power was negatively related to sacrifice among individuals high in IOS, +1 *SD*; $r = -.09$, $p = .015$, 95% CI = [–.16, –00], and among individuals low in IOS, –1 *SD*; $r = -.08$, $p = .038$, 95% CI = [–.15, –.00], and there was no significant difference in the strength of the effect size between high and low IOS individuals, $Q(1) = 0.07$, $p = .791$.

Discussion

Results of the meta-analysis revealed support for the Selfish Power Hypotheses. Across studies, there was a significant negative relation between relative power and sacrifice. Furthermore, results did not reveal any reliable moderation by commitment and IOS in the relation between relative power and sacrifice.

General Discussion

The present work tested two competing hypotheses regarding the relationship between relative power and sacrifice in romantic relationships. The Selfish Power Hypothesis was based on classic theories and research on power that show that power induces self-oriented behavior (e.g., Fiske, 1996), and predicted that higher relative power

would be associated with less sacrifice. The Prosocial Power Hypothesis was based on recent research that has found that, when people feel responsible for another person's welfare—as may be typical in romantic relationships—power promotes prosocial behavior (e.g., Chen et al., 2001), and predicted that higher relative power would be associated with more sacrifice. Finally, we assessed whether commitment or IOS moderated these findings. To test these hypotheses, we conducted five studies from individuals involved in a relationship and from couples.[6] Results showed that power was negatively related to sacrifice. With the exception of Study 2b, this was true even when controlling for commitment, gender, and past sacrifices. The findings were mostly not moderated by commitment or IOS. Furthermore, we showed that the effect of power on sacrifice extended beyond levels of commitment. Finally, results revealed that power predicted sacrifice over time whereas sacrifice did not predict power (Study 3).

Implications and Future Research

Across studies, we found that power is negatively related to sacrifice in romantic relationships. Our findings contribute to the literature on power and are consistent with previous research that showed that power increases self-oriented behavior (e.g., DePaulo & Friedman, 1998; Lammers et al., 2012; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). Although some recent research has shown that power can increase prosocial behavior when people care about the other's welfare (Chen et al., 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010), our findings did not show such an effect. Even in the context of romantic relationships, where partners typically care about each other's needs, power reduced sacrifice. Furthermore, relationship variables that measured concern for the partner's welfare, such as commitment and IOS, did not reliably moderate the effect of power on sacrifice. In contrast, our findings reliably show the selfish consequences of power for interpersonal relationships. Consistent with research that showed that power increased infidelity and sexual abuse (Kaura & Allen, 2004; Lammers et al., 2011), our findings revealed that power is negatively related to prosocial behavior in close relationships.

Interestingly, our findings are not in alignment with previous research that showed that power increases forgiveness, at least among individuals high in commitment (Karremans & Smith, 2010). Although both forgiveness and sacrifice are considered relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., Wieselquist et al., 1999), power seems to affect these behaviors differently. That is, while Karremans and Smith (2010) found that power increased forgiveness, our findings showed that power decreased sacrifice. Karremans and Smith argued that power increases forgiveness among committed individuals because power induces an action-orientation that makes people more likely to act in line with their goals (Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2007). If people are highly committed to their relationship, they have a strong goal to preserve the relationship, and therefore, power stimulates actions toward the fulfillment of that relationship goal, promoting forgiveness. However, the same might not occur for sacrifice because, although forgiveness and sacrifice have both been considered relationship maintenance behaviors, they are qualitatively different phenomena. In fact, it is possible that in situations that call for forgiveness, different goals might be salient than in situations that call for sacrifice. When partners commit a transgression, people might fear relationship dissolution and relationship maintenance goals might become particularly salient in these situations, especially to individuals who are highly committed to the preservation of the relationship. In these situations, power might promote forgiveness because relationship maintenance goals are particularly salient, and power might activate behaviors toward the fulfillment of those salient goals. On the contrary, situations that call for sacrifice represent situations in which individuals are trying to fulfill some specific personal goals, but they encounter their partner's preferences that obstruct the fulfillment of those goals. In those situations, personal goals might be particularly salient, and power holders might be particularly oriented to the fulfillment of those goals, even at the expenses of their partners. Furthermore, situations that call for sacrifice might not be perceived as very threatening to the relationship preservation (Righetti et al., 2013), and personal goals might be much more salient than relationship maintenance goals. Future research should address this idea and test whether the salience of relationship versus personal goals is the mechanism responsible for the differences that have been observed in the relation between power and forgiveness and sacrifice.

Although past research has extensively studied the consequences of power in platonic interpersonal dynamics (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2003; Galinsky et al., 2006; Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010; Lammers et al., 2012) and especially in work settings (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1993), there is not much research on the effects of power in romantic relationships. Our findings suggest that power might affect interpersonal dynamics differently according to the social contexts in which it unfolds. For example, although previous research has shown that power is positively associated with sacrifice in an organizational context (Hoogervorst et al., 2012), we showed that power is negatively related to sacrifice in a romantic context. One possibility might be that, similarly to what occurs for forgiveness, situations that call for sacrifice in romantic relationships versus in organizational settings might trigger different salient goals that powerful people are likely to pursue. It might be that when leaders encounter situations of divergence of interests in organizations, the salient goals are the leader's obligations to make their team work in the most optimal way. On the contrary, when partners encounter situations of divergence of interests in romantic relationships, the salient goals are personal goals whose fulfillment is obstructed by partner's preferences. Future research might benefit from exploring which goals

are salient in different contexts and test whether the salience of different goals is the mechanism responsible for the inconsistent findings on power and prosocial behavior.

Strengths and Limitations

Before closing, we wish to acknowledge strengths and limitations of the present work. One limitation of the present work is that in all our studies, we measured power and we did not manipulate power in the relationship. However, although we did not manipulate power, in Studies 2a and 2b, we temporally assessed power before assessing sacrifice; in Study 4, we showed that power was negatively related to daily sacrifices in a diary measure when controlling for the frequency of previous sacrifices; and in Study 3, we conducted residualized lagged analyses to show that power predicted change in sacrifice over time. The reverse pattern did not occur, in that, results of Study 3 also showed that sacrifice did not predict change in power over time.

Several strengths of this work should also be acknowledged. The negative relationship between relative power and sacrifice was replicated in five different samples of both dating and married couples and in two different countries (United States and the Netherlands). To gain convergent validity of our findings, we also used diverse measurement methods (i.e., questionnaires, videotaped interactions, diary measures) to test our hypotheses. Relative power was both assessed as a self-reported measure and as observed by independent coders during videotaped interactions.

Conclusion

Relationship partners often face situations of divergence of interests—what is most preferred by one partner is not preferred by the other. In these situations, one of them may choose to give up his or her first preference and sacrifice for the relationship. Our work shows that relative power in the relationship plays a crucial role in sacrifice. Specifically, our results indicate that powerful partners are less likely to sacrifice than the less powerful partners. Thus, our work provides convergent evidence for the idea that power undermines prosocial behavior and extends this view to the context of romantic relationships.

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Notes

1. Past research that links power to prosocial behavior has both used measures and manipulations that, similar to our measure of relative social power, were target specific (i.e., participants had power over the same person who was the target of prosocial behavior) or nontarget specific (i.e., participants had power over people in general or toward a different target). In our review of the literature, we do not find consistent differences in the effect of target specific versus nontarget specific power on prosocial behavior. The findings are mixed, regardless of whether power was assessed toward a specific target or not. Thus, we do not have specific reasons to suspect that our findings would not extend to contexts in which power is assessed or manipulated more generally.
2. Contrary to previous research, in four studies out of five, we found that women were more powerful than men (*b*s ranged from .36 to .73, *p*s < .05). Furthermore, in three studies out of five, we found that women sacrificed less than men (*b*s ranged from –.57 to –.23, *p*s < .06).
3. The data analyzed in the current article were part of larger datasets that included several measures. Published articles utilizing these datasets at the time of writing are DeWall et al. (2011); Eastwick, Neff, Finkel, Luchies, and Hunt (2014); Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton, and Gross (2013); Slotter, Emery, and Luchies (2014); and Slotter and Luchies (2014) for Studies 2a and 2b; Arriaga, Kumashiro, Finkel, VanderDrift, and Luchies (2014); Finkel, Campbell, Buffardi, Kumashiro, and Rusbult (2009); Kumashiro, Rusbult, and Finkel (2008); Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, and Stocker (2007); Righetti, Kumashiro, and Campbell (2014); Righetti, Rusbult, and Finkenauer (2010); Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, and Finkel (2009); and Schneider, Konijn, Righetti, and Rusbult (2011) for Study 3. No other articles published from these datasets theoretically or empirically overlap with the idea tested in the present work.
4. Self-report power and observed rated power were significantly associated: in Study 2a, $\beta = .26$, $t(146) = 3.12$, $p = .002$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [.09, .42]; in Study 2b, $\beta = .20$, $t(226) = 3.03$, $p = .003$, 95% CI = [.07, .32].
5. Replacing Studies 2a and 2b self-report power with observer-rated power did not change the conclusion of the meta-analysis.
6. In all studies, there was a significant negative relation between partners' self-report of power, so that the more powerful one individual reported to be, the less powerful the partner reported to be: Study 2a: $r(73) = -.46$, $p < .001$; Study 2b: $r(118) = -.36$, $p < .001$; Study 3: $\beta = -.59$, $t(409) = -17.26$, $p < .001$; Study 4: $\varphi = -.26$, $p < .001$.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental.

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